

## ST JOSEPH THE WORKER, HUTTON: JUBILEE MASS, 13 JULY 2019

In 1647, mid-way during the bitter and bloody English Civil War, Father Henry More, the Provincial of the English Jesuits who was living in hiding in London, received a report about violent raids against Catholics living in Essex made earlier in the Civil War. He was told how Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary forces '...make towards Hutton. There live some poor Catholics... all of them known far and wide for their honest lives; most of them charged with children and two of them having wives still expecting their hour of delivery. They had by their own industry raised to themselves a competent stock and living. The soldiers come upon these, fall upon them like a raging tempest, threaten to kill them, drive away all their cattle, leave neither bed, stool nor any utensil, those who were yesterday well to live now are become beggars. Sir, this is a miserable case, but withal a subject of infinite comfort to see, as I did, how these persons themselves do bear it; they are nothing dismayed; they profess that if they were to lose it again, they would joyfully lose it for God's sake; that He who took this gave it to them first and can give them again as much more. I am confident that the Divine Goodness will not desert His and our cause since He gives the same such resolution to maintain it.'

'God can give them again much more': these were prophetic words, for although in Penal Times (the days of persecution) the handful of Catholics dwelling in Hutton, supported as they were by the local Catholic gentry and aristocracy - the Whites of Hutton Hall and the Petres of Ingatestone Hall and Thorndon Hall - yes, although they suffered trouble and ruin, it was this same steadfastness, the same trust in

Divine Providence, which may be recognised quite unmistakeably three hundred years later when, in the immediate post-war period, ordinary people, supported by their priests, took it upon themselves to revive the Catholic Faith in different, yet by no means easy, circumstances.

But before mentioning precisely that achievement – for this is why we are gathered for this Jubilee Mass today – we need to turn to one George Lansbury, Chairman of the Poplar Board of Guardians and, in due course, Leader of the Labour Party. By the way, for those of you who watch on the television the American detective series ‘Murder She Wrote’, the star of the show, Jessica Fletcher, is played by Angela Lansbury, granddaughter of the founder of Hutton Poplars. For that is what George Lansbury did in 1906: he established a residential school and farm in the fields of Hutton where impoverished children from the East End might have the chance of a better life. Early in the 1950s, as the post-war shortage of housing became acute, the London County Council began selling off the Hutton Poplars estate, beginning with its farmland, in order to provide homes for families, many of whom had themselves come from the bomb-damaged districts of London. Together with the East Ham Estate at Hutton Drive, and not forgetting the many other housing developments in the locality - some public, others private – by the middle of the last century Hutton was fast becoming a part of the Brentwood Cathedral parish in need of separate provision in terms of a church and a school. And so it was that through the efforts parishioners such as Pat Mills and her husband Jack – whom no celebration of this parish could fail to mention – that on 21 March 1954 Canon Holmes, Administrator of the Cathedral, celebrated the first public Mass in Hutton since the Reformation, doing so in the Dining Hall of the Residential School. For five years the Catholics of Hutton thronged the Hall at the Poplars.

Land was duly acquired by the Diocese of Brentwood here in Highview Crescent and in 1959 a temporary church, dedicated to St Joseph the Worker, was opened (now the Parish Hall). And so that is the first of our Jubilees tonight, a Diamond Jubilee - sixty years since the opening of the first church. But there was no resident priest not, that is, until the arrival in September 1960 of Father John Harden, who took up lodgings in Boundary Drive before eventually securing the purchase of the present Presbytery in 1962. And in that same year Father Harden became the first Parish Priest of Hutton when, on 6 October, the parish was formally erected, separated from the Cathedral. How appropriate it is, therefore, that this evening Father Harden's nephew, Father Patrick Daly, should be among the concelebrants at Mass. At present he is the Assistant Priest at the Cathedral but will soon be moving to the bracing climes of Clacton-on-Sea as Parish Priest. Father Harden lies buried in the cemetery at Nazareth House, Southend-on-Sea, and yesterday, while visiting our retired priests, I said a prayer on your behalf at Father Harden's grave. How proud he must be of Hutton today as, no doubt, he gazes down from an eternal perspective.

Father Harden's successor as Parish Priest, Father (now Monsignor) Arthur Barrow, will be one of Father Patrick's parishioners when he arrives in Clacton. Father Arthur is now retired at St Michael's Convent Care Home on the seafront at Clacton, but together with Father Harden it is he who laid the foundations of what we see here today: a beautiful church, opened fifty years ago on 16 July 1969. This is our second reason for celebration: the Golden Jubilee of the present Church of St Joseph the Worker. And although Father Arthur left the parish the year before the church (and indeed the primary school) was opened, and although a recent stroke means that he is unable to be here this evening, it was, in the words of his successor at Hutton,

Father Neville Banks, due to his (Father Arthur's) hard work - itself building upon that of Father Jack Harden - that enabled Father Banks and, indeed, every Parish Priest of St Joseph the Worker down to Father Leslie in the present day to shepherd the flock of Hutton so well.

A homily such as this cannot, and must not, be simply an historical lecture – tempting as though that might be to the present preacher – but should act as a spur to giving thanks to Almighty God, to Our Blessed Lady and – perhaps especially - St Joseph for the fidelity of the priests and parishioners of Hutton over the last sixty years. Many of those people have gone to God, including not only Father Harden and Father Banks but also Father Gordon Godfrey (under whom the church was consecrated by Bishop Casey on 30 April 1976) and Father Brian Drea. Others, parishioners and priests, are still very much with us, including Father Cornelius Joyce and Father David Crabb, both, like Monsignor Arthur Barrow, in retirement. Yet each of them, in their own way, can testify to the fact that this parish was established and developed by immense trust in God, coupled with self-sacrificing hard work by parishioners who, for the most part, were themselves often struggling in material terms, holding down jobs, saving to buy a house, raising their families, and yet who laboured with such great energy on behalf of Holy Church. And yet despite the cares and anxieties of those early years, this parish has never been inward-looking. From the very first it always had an eye on missionary work, notably by giving hospitality to Consolata Fathers from Italy who came to learn English before departing for Kenya or Tanzania. More recently, as part of the twinning arrangement with the Diocese of Dundee in South Africa, Hutton has been linked to the Cathedral parish of Dundee, Natal: how fortuitous it is that tonight Father Gerald Gostling, a priest of the Diocese of Brentwood who has worked in the Diocese of

Dundee for the past fifteen years, is here tonight. Indeed, only yesterday Father Gerald celebrated a Golden Jubilee of his own, fifty years as a priest.

For the rest of the parish history all I can say is: buy the booklet. For now we come to the present and to Father Leslie Knight, by far the longest-serving Parish Priest of Hutton (twenty-one years no less). Under his leadership, and now in partnership with the neighbouring parishes of Ingatestone, Stock and Ongar as part of the Diocesan Vision Programme, the work of preaching the Gospel and establishing the Kingdom of God must, and will, continue. In particular, vocations to the priesthood need be nurtured – and how fortunate we are to have Father Dominic Howarth with us this evening, a ‘home-grown’ priest and the only one, so far – but please God not the last - to have been ordained in this very church. Likewise we must encourage young people to embrace God’s will in the religious life – and you know that one of the former altar servers, Shaun Bailham (now Brother Joseph) is a Dominican Friar – and we must also do all we can to promote the Sacrament of Marriage. How blessed the parish is to have its own school literally on its doorstep as a means of leading the young to Christ.

Finally, I am sure that Bishop Alan would wish to be associated with the words of his predecessor but two, Bishop Bernard Patrick Wall who, on a bitterly cold day in 1969 – 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation (Candlemas) – laid the foundation stone of the church and stood here, in its yet-to-be completed shell. Bishop Wall, in his deep tones and with serious manner, reminded the several hundred people gathered for the occasion that however splendid a building was erected (and this is a fine church), however pastorally active a parish became (and Hutton has certainly excelled in this regard over the years), however many social activities were undertaken (and the parish is known for its friendliness and hospitality), it should

never be forgotten that Jesus Christ is the Foundation and Cornerstone not only of every church building but, more crucially, of the living stones of God's Holy Catholic Church. You, the parishioners past and present of St Joseph the Worker, Hutton, are those living stones. And, as Bishop Wall went on to say as he stood in the half-completed building, everything that happens here – in this church and in this parish – begins and ends with Christ who is really and truly present to us and for us in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Back in 1647 those few persecuted Catholics living in Hutton could only have dreamed of such a moment as today; and yet their perseverance, their witness, their courage and their hope in God has been rewarded. May it ever remain so.

S.F.